

Investigating learners' reports about the L2 classroom

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Abstract

L2 classrooms are often viewed as places where learning opportunities arise from a range of different types of input and interaction. For example, beneficial interactions are said to occur between teachers and learners, and between learners themselves. Learners' and teachers' reports about their perceptions of L2 classrooms have informed a range of classroom studies. This study focuses on learners' reports about the L2 classroom, and explores different methods, or formats, of obtaining reports. Reports (n=56) were elicited from 16 adult ESL learners using three different formats. Learners filled out the reports during six 50-minute ESL classes. The effect of formats and classroom context on the quantity and quality of learners' reports about their learning was investigated. Results suggest that the format of the report seemed to affect both quantity and quality of what learners reported, with different classroom activities and interactions also playing a role.

1. Introduction

The L2 classroom is often viewed as a place where “different learning opportunities are provided through the interaction between participants” (Ellis 1992: 171). In the mid-1980's, several researchers critiqued conventional views about instruction being restricted to time spent in a classroom, or to a particular methodology, syllabus, or a teacher's objectives. They called for research that could capture the complexity of the L2 classroom experience (Allwright 1984a; Ellis 1984; Breen 1985; Faerch 1985; Gaies 1983). These researchers proposed that instruction should be viewed as “the total set of interactions in which teacher and student participate” (Ellis 1984: 32), claiming that learning opportunities are created through the interactions of both the teacher with learners, and between learners. In this view, learners may generate their own learning opportunities at different junctures in language lessons, through their interactions with oral or written texts, with classmates, or teachers. The input

made available to L2 learners in the L2 classroom becomes “a collective product with which the learners interact actively as both creators and interpreters” (Breen 1996: 93).

An important challenge associated with this view of the L2 classroom is to investigate learning outcomes, namely “the process by which different learners take different things from the many different learning opportunities that each lesson offers” (Allwright 1984b: 5). Since each learner has their own unique interactions with the input available in the L2 classroom, it can be difficult to identify the learning opportunities that are available to each learner, especially when the examination must take into account each learner’s interaction with different syllabi, methodologies, objectives, or materials.

One interesting approach that has been used in a number of classroom-based studies to gain insight into learning opportunities is the elicitation of learners’ reports about L2 classrooms. It has been claimed that these can provide insight into learners’ perceptions about the learning opportunities that are available to them. Thus, previous studies have used learners’ reports as a tool to examine the discourse context of information claimed to have been learned (Allwright 1984a; Jones 1992; Slimani 1989, 1992); to compare teachers’ and learners’ perceptions about classroom activities, learning objectives and teaching techniques (Block 1996; Breen 1991; Palmeira 1995); and to investigate learners’ perceptions about interactional feedback (Mackey 2000; Roberts 1995). Despite the growing number of studies that use L2 learners’ classroom reports to inform research or teaching, there has been little research to date that explores this interesting methodological technique for eliciting learner data. Previous research has implemented and obtained learner reports in a variety of ways. What follows is a brief review of how learner reports have been utilized in L2 classroom research.

1.1. *Learners’ reports and classroom discourse*

Current use of learners’ reports about the L2 classroom was influenced by the pioneering work conducted by Allwright and his colleagues in the 1980s (Allwright 1984a, 1984b, 1987). Allwright (1984b) stated that his interest in L2 learners’ perceptions about classroom events was stimulated by the responses of ESL learners to the question “what did you learn today?” He noted that the ESL learners were often unable to describe what they had learned in class on any given day, and that learners from the same class gave different accounts of what had been learned. These anecdotal observations led Allwright to speculate about the sources for learners’ differing perceptions, and to question whether their perceptions were related to subsequent learning. He suggested that learners’ differing perceptions about the content of a lesson might be related to the interactive context in which the information occurred, and who participated in the interaction.

In order to explore these ideas more systematically, Allwright (1984b, 1987) devised a method to elicit learners' reports about their learning, or as he termed it, 'uptake.' He operationalized uptake as "whatever it is that learners get from all the language learning opportunities language lessons make available to them" (Allwright 1987: 97). He elicited learners' uptake through a three step process: (a) at the end of class, each learner wrote down the points that arose during class on a chart, (b) after a short break, the charts were returned to the learners so that they could indicate which items on the chart they learned or learned more about, and (c) the learners were interviewed about the information they wrote down on the chart. Finally, he examined transcripts of the classroom discourse in order to identify the context for each piece of information the learners had written down. Allwright (1984b: 13, 15) suggested that this type of research could be useful for "helping learners get more out of language classes", as well as for identifying what factors "motivate learners' selective attention to different types of input".

Using the technique developed by Allwright, Slimani (1989, 1992) investigated whether classroom discourse provides insight into the relationship between instruction and language learning. Slimani (1989) examined the type of interaction in classroom discourse that led to reports of uptake by 13 Algerian university students enrolled in a pre-academic, grammar-based EFL class. She defined uptake as "the learner's perceptions of what they have learned from the interactive events they have just been through" (Slimani 1989: 224). The learners completed the uptake sheets for six 2-hour classes over a six-week period. The uptake sheets required that learners write down what they had learned about grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and language use. Slimani isolated the items on the uptake sheets reported as new information, and traced them back to the classroom data (via audiotapes and transcripts) in order to identify whether specific features of the classroom discourse were more likely to result in reports of learning.

Slimani's initial analysis indicated that the majority of the reported items (89%) had been the focus of instruction. In other words, the teacher initiated the items into the classroom discourse and discussed them in metalinguistic terms. Interestingly, not all of the items explicitly discussed by the teacher were reported by the learners. Slimani classified all the items in the classroom discourse according to who had initiated each item, the teacher or a learner. She found that the teacher initiated more items than the learners. However, her learners were more likely to report items that were initiated by other learners than items initiated by the teacher. These learners' responses to a final questionnaire indicated that despite their reporting of learner-initiated items, they did not rate input supplied by their classmates as being influential for their own learning. In a later analysis of the same data, Slimani (1992) reported that the learners' uptake was highly idiosyncratic. It was unusual for any item that had

occurred in the classroom discourse to be reported by more than three learners, despite the fact that the class was teacher-fronted and all the learners carried out the same grammar-oriented activities. These findings clearly suggest that learners may have different perceptions about the same classroom events.

Jones (1992) also investigated the relationship between discourse context and learners' written reports about the L2 classroom. He elicited written reports from 9 ESL learners enrolled in an upper-intermediate speaking/listening course at a British university at the end of two 95-minute lessons. The learners were instructed to write down any "words, phrases, grammar, and techniques they thought they had learned from the lesson" (Jones 1992: 141), and to indicate whether the items they wrote down were "new" or "known before." The first lesson included approximately equal amounts of teacher-fronted and small group activities, while the second lesson consisted primarily of learner-learner activities. Jones traced each item reported on the questionnaires back to the classroom discourse using the teachers' materials, notes of learner-learner interaction during group work, and a videotape of the second lesson, and classified the context of each item as teacher/material-supplied input or student-supplied input.¹ He found that the majority of the items (new and already known) reported for both lessons occurred in teacher-supplied input.

1.2. Comparing the perceptions of teachers and learners

Learner's reports about the L2 classroom have also been used to compare the (often differing) perceptions of L2 learners and teachers. Breen (1991: 215) argued that any attempt to explain how learning occurs in the L2 classroom should not rely exclusively on a description of "the surface talk of teacher and learners" but should consider how the participants understand what happens in the classroom. To explore these ideas empirically, Breen (1991: 216) asked 106 experienced L2 teachers enrolled in a graduate degree program to participate in a "language teaching and learning experiment". The L2 teachers selected a language that they would like to learn from the languages already known by at least two of their colleagues, resulting in 21 language-learning groups. The members of the language-learning groups took the role of a teacher (a native or near-native speaker of the target language), an assistant/observer, or a learner. The teachers implemented a series of 45-minute language-learning lessons. At the end of the first and third lessons, the teachers and learners described, in writing, the specific teaching techniques the teachers had used during the lesson, and their motivation for using them. The observers kept a written record while the lesson was in progress. After the instructional period concluded, all the participants, individually and in groups, used these written records to compile a ranking of the teaching techniques and reasons for their use. Breen found considerable variation in the reports from members of the

same language-learning groups, as well as in the reports of individual participants. As Breen (1991: 221) noted, "whilst one teacher will attach a particular set of beliefs and values to an instance of classroom behavior, another teacher is likely to apply a different set".

In part motivated by Breen's work, Block (1996) also investigated teachers and learners' perceptions about the L2 classroom. However, he explored the perceptions of more traditional ESL learners rather than experienced L2 teachers. Block (1996) elicited learners' reports about the L2 classroom from six MBA candidates who were enrolled in a required English course, as well as from their teacher. The participants kept an oral diary (in the L1) in which they recorded their responses to five questions about classroom activities, the purpose of those activities, the role of the teacher in promoting learning, and what had been learned. Block audiotaped and observed three lessons, and elicited oral diaries about those lessons from seven other learners enrolled in the class. He found that learners' and teachers' perceptions about the type of activities in each lesson were fairly consistent. By examining the reports of one learner in more detail, he was able to identify several gaps between the perceptions of this learner and the teacher, particularly in terms of the purpose of classroom activities. Block (1996: 192) concluded that learners "are constantly attempting to make sense out of classroom instruction", and suggested that teachers should strive to make classroom activities seem coherent to learners.

1.3. *Learners' reports and selective attention to input*

Comparisons of teachers' and learners' perceptions about the L2 classroom have also been carried out to explore whether learners recognize the language forms teachers target through instruction. One such study, carried out by Palmeira (1995), compared learners' reports about what they had learned with the teacher's account of the language learning objectives targeted in the lessons. Eighteen adults enrolled in an advanced Hawai'ian language class participated in the study together with their teacher. Palmeira (1995: 137) elicited uptake, defined as "items which students claimed to have learned during a specific class session", through providing written charts for the learners to fill out at the end of each of three 50-minute lessons. The teacher's objectives and target language items for those three lessons were explored. Palmeira found that the learners tended to report the language structures and vocabulary items that the teacher had targeted in each lesson. In addition, learners rarely reported language forms that the teacher had not intentionally targeted. Furthermore, the structures that were reported most often on the uptake charts were produced accurately more often on subsequent tests.

Researchers have suggested that learners' reports can provide insight into the types of L2 classroom input that learners attend to (Allwright 1984b). In

particular, they have been used to explore whether learners attend to input provided through teacher feedback.² For example, Roberts (1995) explored whether university-level Japanese as a Foreign Language learners recognized that the teacher was correcting them, and whether they could identify the nature of the correction. He videotaped one 50-minute class, and identified all the instances of error correction across seven feedback categories. Three volunteer learners from the class viewed the video several days later and wrote down their perceptions about instances of teacher feedback, and the error targeted in the feedback. Roberts found that the learners did not report many instances of error correction and rarely identified the target of the feedback. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the learners' reports reflect their perceptions during the lesson at the time the feedback was provided, due to the fact they gave their reports while watching a videotape several days later.

A recent study by Mackey (2000) elicited learners' reports about the L2 classroom in order to explore whether learners noticed, and benefited from, teacher feedback. Learners in two intermediate level ESL classes were given charts in which they could write down what they were noticing during class and whether that information was new to them. After the classes ended, learners also watched videotapes and commented on the classroom feedback episodes.³ Both classes also carried out pre- and post-tests, with results indicating that the learners who received feedback performed significantly better on some forms than the learners who did not receive feedback. Mackey found a relationship between learners' reports about what they noticed and their L2 developmental processes, with learners exhibiting greater development for the structures that they reported most frequently. This is similar to Palmeira's (1995) finding that structures with the greatest number of uptake reports were produced accurately more often than structures with few uptake reports.

1.4. *Methodological considerations*

In summary, learners' reports about the L2 classroom have been used in a number of ways in classroom-based research to explore a variety of issues of interest to L2 researchers and practitioners. Despite this fairly widespread use of learners' reports, little research has addressed the nature of the instrument used to obtain reports; that is, the uptake charts, or sheets that learners fill out. An important issue regarding uptake charts is the possibility that the format or implementation of the charts might affect the amount and nature of what learners report about the L2 classroom. For example, instructions for the uptake charts and oral diaries used in previous studies (Allwright 1984b, 1987; Block 1996; Jones 1992; Palmeira 1995; Slimani 1989, 1992) directed learners to report what they had learned at the end of each lesson. It is possible that this instruction might have influenced the learners' reporting of information. First, learn-

ers often regard their teachers as the primary sources for 'learning' (in terms of new knowledge) in the classroom (Jones 1992). As a result, they may tend to report information provided by their teachers, rather than information provided by their peers. Second, learners may have written down what they thought their teacher expected of them in terms of learning (Palmeira 1995). This may lead learners to report the structures or vocabulary items that the teacher targeted through instruction, rather than other language items that might have occurred during the lesson.

A further methodological difference in the previous research is the effect of timing on the quantity and quality of learners' reports. As described above, learners typically completed uptake charts after the lesson had ended. In several studies (Allwright 1984b, 1987; Jones 1992; Palmeira 1995; Slimani 1989, 1992) the learners provided reports during the last minutes of the class period. However, other studies reported that a longer period of time elapsed between the classroom events and the elicitation of learner reports. For example, Block (1996) noted that the learners provided reports at least 6 hours after the end of the lesson, while Roberts (1995) elicited reports several days after the classroom events had ended. It is possible that a delay between classroom events and reporting may affect the information reported. Memory constraints may result in fewer items being reported, as the learners may not remember all of the items that they learned when the lesson was in progress. They may limit their reports to the more salient items that were the focus of explicit or extended discussion. Mackey (2000) required learners to complete the charts while class was in progress. This technique may result in more detailed reporting since the learners can write down information as it occurs. However, this technique may also result in selective reporting because the learners may be too involved in classroom activities to write information on the charts.

The current study explored some of these methodological issues. Three different uptake charts were utilized in order to explore whether the format of the chart affected the amount and nature of learners' reports about their learning. Different types of classroom activities that provided a variety of input and interaction opportunities were considered. The following research question was addressed: Are learners' reports about the L2 classroom affected by the format of the uptake chart and the classroom context?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The L2 participants were 16 adult ESL learners from a variety of L1 backgrounds enrolled in an intensive English program (IEP) at a university in the United States (U.S.). The learners were placed in an intact class at the high-intermediate level based on their scores on the university placement exam. Half

of the learners reported having taken the TOEFL exam. Their scores ranged from 450 to 565, with a mean score of 529.5. Their ages ranged from 18 to 41, with an average age of 22.5. The majority of the learners had recently arrived in the U.S., with stays ranging from 2 months to 3 years and an average length of residence of 8.5 months. All the learners reported previous English instruction. Their average length of previous study was 5.7 years (with a range from 1 to 11 years).

2.2. *Curriculum*

The course of study for all learners consisted of 20 hours of instruction each week for 16 weeks, with a daily two-hour integrated skills class and two content-based electives (50 minutes each). The learners' content-based grammar elective class, business decision-making, served as the context for the study reported here. The speaking and listening objectives for the class related to the development of understanding of topics, main ideas, and supporting points, as well as making use of functional expressions for conversation in social settings and academic discussions. The reading and writing objectives emphasized the development of strategies to identify the main points and supporting details of authentic texts, and the acquisition of skills necessary to write compositions using information from several sources. Opportunities for learners to pay attention to linguistic form were provided in the content-based elective through explicit instruction about specific grammatical structures as well as corrective feedback in response to learner errors.

2.3. *Materials*

Three different uptake charts, essentially printed tables with blank spaces for learners to fill in, were developed to elicit the learners' reports about the L2 classroom. Each format had a different focus but requested the same basic information. All uptake charts provided opportunities for learners to record: (a) which language forms or concepts they noticed, such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, or business; (b) who produced the reported items, for example the learner, the teacher, or their classmates; and (c) whether the reported items were new to the learner. Three different uptake chart formats were developed (Appendix).

The language focus format required learners to report items according to four main areas: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and content. Each of these areas contained bullets to facilitate reporting of individual items. The amount of space provided for learners to write down items was the same for each area. Learners indicated the producer of each item and provided information about their previous knowledge by checking the appropriate columns next to each item. A section of the language focus format (relating to pronuncia-

tion) is provided in Example 1. The grammar, vocabulary and content areas were identical to the pronunciation area.

(1) Language focus format

What are you noticing about ...	Who said it? (check as many as you want)				Was this new to you? (check as many as you want)		
	Teacher	Classmate	Me	In the book	Yes, new	No, heard of it	No, knew it
<i>Pronunciation</i>							
•							
•							
•							
•							
•							
•							

In the language focus format, learners had relatively few decisions to make in filling out the forms. It seemed possible that the language focus format might result in more reporting because there was no need for learners to carefully consider the linguistic aspects of items they were reporting. However, it is also possible that this format would result in less reporting because the form may not provide the learners with enough guidance about which linguistic items they could report.

The language and context focus format required learners to report on the same four main areas. Each main area was subdivided into 6 categories according to the producer of the item (such as the teacher or a classmate). Again, learners indicated their previous knowledge about the items reported by checking the appropriate categories next to each item. The language and context focus format is illustrated in Example 2.

(2) Language and context focus format

What are you noticing about ...		Was this new to you?		
		Yes, new	No, heard of it	No, knew it
<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>Examples</i>			
I said				
Classmate said				
Teacher said to me				
Teacher said to a classmate				
Teacher said to the class				

The language and context format was designed so that learners first thought about the context of each item before they reported it on the charts. It is possible that this format could result in less reporting because learners need to spend time considering where to place items on the chart. However, the chart

was designed to provide more structure and transparency in terms of what was required of learners, which might also result in more reporting.

The structure focus format provided 8 areas for learners to report items related to specific grammatical structures and 3 areas for items related to vocabulary/idioms, pronunciation, or content. Learners indicated the producer of each item and their previous knowledge by checking the appropriate columns next to each item, as illustrated in Example 3.

(3) Structure focus format

What are you noticing about ...		Who said it? (check as many as you want)				Was this new to you? (check as many as you want)		
	<i>Examples</i>	Teacher	Class mate	Me	In the book	Yes, new	No, heard of it	No, knew it
Relative clauses								
Modals								

The structure focus format required learners to specify grammatical categories for each item, from a range of choices on the chart. This format may result in more reporting, particularly for items related to grammar, because it specifies which grammatical items the learners should report. However, it may result in less reporting because learners may find it difficult and/or time-consuming to determine which category an item should be written in, and they also need to discard items not required by the chart.

A final questionnaire was also administered to explore the learners' perceptions about the different uptake charts. The short questionnaire was designed to allow learners to comment on the three different uptake charts in terms of their user-friendliness and their usefulness for learning English.⁴

2.4. Procedure

Learners filled out the uptake charts during six consecutive 50-minute lessons. The three formats, language focus, language and context focus, and structure focus, were rotated and counter-balanced so that each learner had the opportunity to use all three formats over the experimental period (twice for each format). The experimental procedure is illustrated in Figure 1. Learners completed three different uptake charts over three class periods to become familiar with them before the charts were collected and data analyzed.

The teacher distributed uptake charts at the beginning of each lesson, and asked the learners to write down anything they noticed, about language or content, during the lesson. The teacher collected the uptake charts at the end of each lesson and returned them the next day with content-based comments ("do

Lesson	Group 1 (n=5)	Group 2 (n=6)	Group 3 (n=5)
1	Language & context focus	Language focus	Structure focus
2	Language & context focus	Language focus	Structure focus
3	Structure focus	Language & context focus	Language focus
4	Structure focus	Language & context focus	Language focus
5	Language focus	Structure focus	Language & context focus
6	Language focus	Structure focus	Language & context focus
7	Questionnaire	Questionnaire	Questionnaire

Figure 1. *Timing of learner reports*

you think that approach would work in your country?"), as well as some monitored comments on spelling and grammar ("durability is non-count"). The learners completed a total of 56 uptake charts, comprised of 21 language focus formats, 18 language and context focus formats, and 17 structure focus formats.⁵ At the end of the experimental period, learners filled out the final questionnaires. A total of 12 questionnaires were collected.⁶

3. Results

The research question asked whether learners' reports were affected by the format of the uptake charts and the classroom context. To address this question, all reports were examined from four perspectives: (a) the total number of items reported; (b) the distribution of reported items across the areas specified on the charts, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and non-linguistic content knowledge; (c) whether the items were known or new information for the learners; and (d) who had produced the reported items: the teacher, the learner, or a classmate.

The total number of items reported and the distribution across language areas for each format is shown in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 2. The total number of reported items was highest for the language focus format (98), followed by the language and context focus format (57) and the structure focus format (47). Because the number of charts per format differed, the average number of reported items was also calculated. The same trend was found. The language focus format elicited the highest number of items (4.7) per chart, the language and context focus format elicited an average of 3.2 items per chart, and the structure focus format elicited an average of 2.8 items. As can be seen

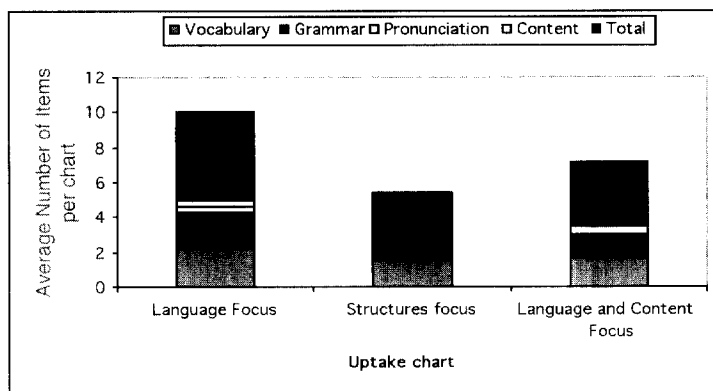


Figure 2. Total number of items reported and distribution across language areas for each format

in Table 1 and Figure 2, the majority of reported items concerned grammar and vocabulary for all three formats, with few items about pronunciation (for example, “de’nim”) or content (for example “why new items are needed”) being reported. The number of grammar items reported differed according to the chart, ranging from 1 for the structure focus format to 2 for language focus format. Examples of grammar items were “so-adjective-that” and “due to N”. The number of vocabulary items ranged from 1.4 for the structure focus format to 2.1 for language focus format, and included examples such as “bleak = not very hopeful” and “high end = expensive”. Thus, in terms of the amount and type of information reported by the learners on the uptake charts, the format of the uptake chart seemed to have an effect on how much learners reported, with the language focus format eliciting the most items in total, including more reporting for both grammar and vocabulary. Given that the structure focus chart was designed to target grammar, and it actually elicited the least amount of grammar, this result was a little surprising.⁷

Results with respect to knowledge and the producer of reported items are presented in Table 2. In terms of knowledge, the learners reported similar amounts of new and not new⁸ information on all four formats. Approximately 40% of the information elicited by the language focus and language and context focus formats was reported as new and 60% was reported as not new. The structure focus format was a little different. This chart elicited reporting of 60% new information and 40% not new.

In terms of who produced the items that the learners reported, regardless of the format they attributed the items to the teacher more often than they attributed them to their classmates. This trend was the strongest for the language focus format, with 72% (63) of the items being attributed to the teacher and

Table 1. Total number and distribution of reported items by format

	Language focus (n=21)		Structures focus (n=17)		Language & Content focus (n=18)	
	Total	Per chart	Total	Per chart	Total	Per chart
Vocabulary	43	2.1	26	1.5	26	1.4
Grammar	42	2.0	17	1.0	22	1.2
Pronunciation	5	.3	4	.2	8	.4
Content	8	.4	0	0	1	.1
Total	98	4.7	47	2.8	57	3.2

Table 2. Knowledge and context of reported items by format

	Language focus (n=21)		Structures focus (n=17)		Language & Content focus (n=18)	
	Total	Per chart	Total	Per chart	Total	Per chart
New	14	.7	16	.9	16	.9
Not new	20	.9	11	.6	22	1.2
Teacher	63	3.2	26	1.5	38	2.1
Classmate	16	.8	12	.7	17	.9
Self	4	.2	12	.7	9	.5
Book	5	.2	5	.3	6	.3

only 18 % (16) of the items being attributed to a classmate. For the structure focus format 47 % (26) items were attributed to the teacher and 22 % (12) to a classmate and for the language and context focus format, it was 54 % (38) and 17 % (24). Students very rarely attributed items they reported to themselves, or to the textbook. Thus, regardless of format, learners reported that the items they wrote down on the charts were produced by their teacher more often than their peers.

Further insight into the effect of format on learners' reports was obtained by examining the level of detail learners reported for each item. Learners did not provide detailed information for every item they wrote down on the charts. Sometimes they simply wrote down an item without information about either the person who produced the item or their prior knowledge of the item. Sometimes they provided information about one without the other. For example, nine learners reported the lexical item "thrived" on their uptake charts during one lesson. Learners who completed the language focus format and the structure focus format simply wrote "thrive" in the vocabulary area of the form. In contrast, learners who completed the language and context chart wrote "thrive – getting better", most also including the context ("teacher said it") and that it

Table 3. Level of detail provided for each item by format

Information reported	Item, speaker and knowledge		Item and speaker		Item and knowledge		Item only	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Language focus	32/98	33	49/98	50	2/98	2	15/98	15
Language and context focus	41/57	72	16/57	28	0	0	0	0
Structure focus	28/47	60	10/47	21	0	0	9/47	19

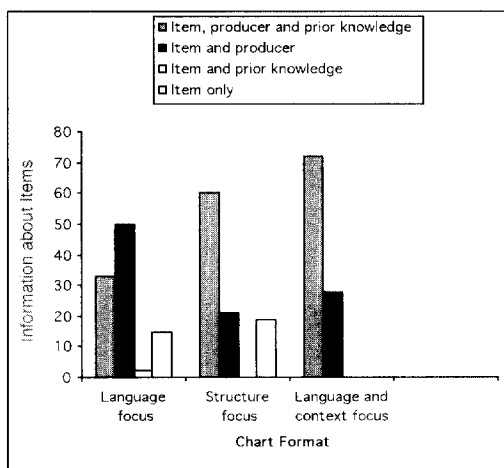


Figure 3. Level of detail provided for each item by format

was new information. Additional analysis was therefore carried out to determine whether there was any relationship between the level of detail learners provided and the format of the chart. As shown in Table 3, learner's reports included most detail for the language and context focus format. When using the language and context focus format, the learners included information about the speaker and their knowledge for 72 % of the items. In contrast, they provided complete information for 60 % of the items on the structure focus format and only 33 % of the items on the language focus format. The learners' reports lacked information about the speakers or their own prior knowledge 19 % of the time when using the structure focus format, and 15 % of the time when using the language focus format. Thus, it appears that format did affect the level of detail learners provided for each item, with the language and context focus format eliciting more detailed information for each item.

4. Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to investigate whether learners' reports about the L2 classroom were affected by the format of the uptake charts used to elicit those reports, or by the classroom context. The results indicate that although the trends of what learners reported were generally similar in all three formats, the language focus format differed from the other two charts in terms of the number of items elicited (more grammar and more vocabulary, more new information, and more teacher-produced items) than the other formats. The language and context focus format, on the other hand, elicited more information about the specific items that the learners reported. In particular, it is interesting that the structure focus format produced the fewest grammar-related comments. This may be the case because the structure focus format was more detailed and required learners to think about the specific forms that they were reporting. This may have cognitively overloaded the learners in some way. The lack of specificity on the language focus format may have facilitated more reporting. In terms of level of detail, the language and context focus format was more effective at eliciting more information about each item. While the language focus format may have encouraged greater *quantity* of reporting, the language and context focus format appears to have encouraged *quality* in terms of more detailed reporting. It seems that careful design and possibly piloting of uptake charts is in order, particularly given that the structure focus format and the language and context focus format were expected to produce more grammar and more vocabulary respectively.

4.1. *Classroom context*

The majority of items (96%, 193/202) reported by the learners concerned language form, specifically grammar and vocabulary. Relatively few reports were made about content (4%, 9/202), which is very interesting given that learners had the opportunity to report items related to content on all formats.

Responses to the final questionnaire also indicate that most learners found the uptake charts helpful for both grammar and vocabulary (9/11 learners) but less than half of the learners also reported finding the uptake charts helpful for content (5/11 learners).⁹ This may seem somewhat surprising since the data were collected in a 'content-based' classroom (Brinton, Snow and Wesche 1989). On the other hand, an orientation to language form is not unexpected since the course was designed to be a content-based grammar elective that involved a focus on form through content. Recently, researchers have suggested that some content-based classrooms may provide few opportunities for learners to focus on L2 form (Pica 2000). However, in this content-based classroom, the learners' reports suggest that they were focusing more on language than on content. Thus, these results support claims that learners' reports

about learning tend to focus on language form, as noted by Palmeira (1995) and Slimani (1989, 1992). Two other possibilities exist. The learners may have viewed the vocabulary items they were recording as expressing lesson content. We raise this question as a matter that future research may address. It is also possible that the learners did not possess the linguistic skills necessary to express content-based concepts on the uptake charts. Whether learners in an exclusively, or more traditional content-based classroom would also mostly report information about language form is an open empirical question.

4.2. *Orientation to teacher-discourse*

Similar to previous studies (Jones 1992; Palmeira 1995; Slimani 1989, 1992), the results of the present study indicate that learners tended to attribute items they reported to the teacher, rather than their peers or themselves. In one example, four learners reported the lexical item "precedes" on their uptake charts. Three of the learners reported the item as originating with the teacher and one learner did not provide any information about the context. However, in the teacher's post-lesson summary, she noted that four learners had discussed the word "precedes" which arose incidentally during group work, that they had reached consensus about its meaning and then asked her to confirm that they had understood the word correctly. Such examples may call into question the validity, or at least the level of detail, in some of the information that learners report (the teacher did say the word, but only after the learners discussed it). This example points to the importance of triangulation for all classroom data.

Responses on the questionnaire indicated that the majority of the learners (9/11) perceived the uptake charts as helpful for getting them to pay attention to what the teacher said, while less than half (5/11) of the learners perceived them as helpful for paying attention to what their classmates said. Although it is an interesting question, the current study was not designed to investigate why learners tend to report information conveyed by the teacher more frequently than that conveyed by other students, or at least perceive information this way. One possible interpretation is that learners focus their attention almost exclusively on the teacher and attend much less to the language spoken by their peers. As a result, they report many more items spoken by the teacher, and possibly also report peer produced items when *highlighted* by the teacher. However, an alternative interpretation is that learners do attend to peer input, but simply choose not to report it, perhaps because they do not consider it as a source of L2 learning. Some evidence for this interpretation can be found in Slimani (1989, 1992). In her study, though learners were more likely to report learner-initiated items than teacher-initiated items, they did not rate input supplied by their classmates as being influential for their own learning on a final questionnaire. However, theory in second language acquisition would suggest

that it is likely that learners can benefit from peer input, particularly in conversational interaction, regardless of whether they perceive it as useful for their own L2 learning (Long 1996).

4.3. *Influence of classroom activities*

In order to further explore the finding about little reporting of peer-produced items, we also examined the interactional structure of the lessons in the context of the learner reports. As might be expected from the finding that learners mostly reported what their teacher said, the amount of information reported was much greater for lessons that contained more teacher-fronted activities than pair or group work. During the experimental period, the teacher implemented six 50-minute lessons. In three of the six lessons, more than half of the class period was spent on teacher-fronted activities (reviewing grammar exercises, explaining grammatical structures, and pre-reading vocabulary-building activities). The majority of the items (76 %, 154/202) reported by the learners occurred during these three lessons. In contrast, the learners reported fewer items (24 %, 48/202) that occurred in lessons where more than half of the focus of the class time was spent carrying out individual work and pair or small group activities. One possible explanation is that learners have more time to fill out the uptake charts during teacher-fronted activities. They may be unable to write down information on the charts while they are simultaneously carrying out pair or group work activities. This interpretation is supported by learners' responses to the final questionnaire. Predictably, they reported that it was more difficult to fill out the charts during pair/group activities than during teacher-fronted activities. Another possible explanation is that learners are able to record information during pair or group work, but simply choose not to. If the learners do not regard peer input as valuable for language learning, as discussed above, they may be unlikely to report information that occurred during pair or group work on the uptake charts.

The tendency for learners to report more information for lessons with teacher-fronted activities may not be related to ease of completing the uptake charts while activities are in progress. For example, Jones (1992) asked learners to complete uptake charts at the *end* of lessons, but like the current study, also found the number of reported items higher for the lesson with more teacher-fronted activities. It is possible that learners find it easier to remember and report the information conveyed in teacher-fronted activities than pair/group work, which have greater communicative demands. Our results highlight the importance of careful implementation of uptake charts, especially in terms of providing learners with enough time to fill them out.

4.4. *Learner preferences in timing*

Individual differences were also observed in terms of when the learners preferred to fill out the uptake charts, although these observations should be treated with caution because of the low numbers of learners in this study. Responses on the final questionnaire indicated that some learners preferred to fill them out while the lesson was in progress (5/12), while others preferred to wait until the end of the lesson (3/12). Comments on the final questionnaire indicate that some learners found it difficult to complete the uptake charts while simultaneously carrying out classroom activities. For example, one learner remarked that “it’s difficult to write down. I cannot concentrate the class.” In contrast, other learners claimed that they preferred to complete the uptake charts during the lesson, in part to facilitate remembering. One learner commented that she liked to write down information “as soon as I see the new words, grammars, it’s the best way.” These responses may indicate different language learning styles in terms of when learners prefer to focus on language form. While the current study is small-scale, the data obtained do suggest that providing opportunities for learners to reflect on form both during and after meaning-based activities may accommodate individual variability in learners’ preferences.

5. **Implications and conclusions**

Uptake charts are potentially useful instruments for teachers and researchers, and therefore represent promising avenues for research. As shown in the review of the literature, learners’ reports have been utilized to address many interesting questions.

In terms of classroom instruction, teachers may use uptake charts to help learners pay attention to linguistic form within the context of meaning-based interaction. Based on our study, it seems it is worthwhile to pilot test and compare uptake charts for maximum effectiveness. One challenge with implementing uptake charts in the L2 classroom is the issue of when to fill them out. Trends in our data suggest that it may be difficult for learners to complete the uptake charts during pair or group work. However, more than half of the learners reported in the questionnaire that filling out the charts during class time was most helpful, despite the perceived difficulty of doing so. Careful implementation of the uptake charts could address this issue. For example, socializing learners to the use of the uptake charts throughout the class and drawing learners’ attention to the charts occasionally may facilitate learners’ consistent use of the uptake charts.

Uptake charts are also useful for researchers who investigate learners’ perceptions about L2 classroom events. Uptake charts could be used to explore what learners report about language forms targeted through instruction. This might be particularly helpful in content-based classrooms where the language

forms targeted in each lesson may not be stated explicitly. Uptake charts can also provide teacher-researchers with valuable information about the individual learning styles of their students, which could then be used to inform pedagogical decisions.

L2 researchers may also find uptake charts worthwhile tools to investigate current questions about the SLA process. For example, they can be used to obtain data about noticing, to shed light on the relationship between classroom L2 instruction and developmental outcomes. Researchers exploring the interaction between individual learner characteristics, such as aptitude, working memory, language learning styles and L2 learning may also find uptake charts to be useful tools. In summary, when carefully designed and implemented, uptake charts can be valuable methodological tools.

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Notes

1. Any item spoken by the teacher was classified as teacher-supplied input, regardless of who initiated the item.
2. They have been used in a variety of ways in this respect.
3. This procedure is a type of stimulated recall. Stimulated recall is an introspective method in which learners report what they were thinking at the time of carrying out an activity, shortly after completing that activity. For example, learners might report on their thoughts while making changes to an essay. A videotape of them producing the final written product might be used as a stimulus for their thoughts. For further discussion of stimulated recall and the debate about the use of introspection in research, see Ericsson and Simon (1993), Færch and Kasper (1987), and Gass and Mackey (2000).
4. The final questionnaire consisted of 9 questions (open-ended and forced choice items) designed to elicit comments about: (a) the usefulness of uptake charts for language learning; (b) preferences about which, if any, format they preferred, and (c) preferences about timing for completion of uptake charts.
5. The number of uptake charts for each format differed slightly due to the fact that attendance was not 100% throughout the experimental period (not every learner attended every class).
6. Four learners did not complete the questionnaire because immediately after the class ended they returned to their own countries (2 learners) or left the area to attend other educational institutions (2 learners).
7. It was observed that many of the structure focus format charts were completed during lesson plans that had the lowest number of items reported. As a result, it is possible that the general trends reported above were due to a relationship between format and lesson plan. To explore this, uptake charts for two lesson plans with equivalent types and amounts of activities were compared. During these two lessons an equal number of learners completed each format. For this subset of the data, the average

number of items reported per chart was 5.6 for the language focus format, 3.9 for the structure focus format, and 3.0 for the language and context format. In terms of grammar, the language focus format elicited an average of 2.8 items, while the structure focus elicited an average of 1.7 items and the language and focus format elicited an average of 4 items. In terms of vocabulary, the language focus format again elicited the greater number of items (average 2.9), with the structure focus and the language and context focus both eliciting an average number of 2 vocabulary items per chart. Thus, the results for this subset of (equivalent) data confirm the finding that the language focus format elicited the greatest number of items, with the structure focus and language and context focus formats eliciting a comparable number of items.

8. The category 'not new' includes information that the learners reported either as already known or having heard of before.
9. In considering the number of students who responded to each item on the questionnaire, it should be noted that some questions allowed learners to respond "yes" to more than one option. Thus, some learners reported that the charts were helpful for *both* grammar and vocabulary, and one learner reported that they were not helpful at all.

Appendix. Uptake chart formats

Language focus format

What are you noticing about ...	Who said it? (check as many as you want)				Was this new to you? (check as many as you want)		
	Teacher	Class mate	Me	In the book	Yes, new	No, heard of it	No, knew it
<i>Pronunciation</i> ● ● ● ● ● ● ●							
<i>Vocabulary</i> ● ● ● ● ● ● ●							
<i>Grammar</i> ● ● ● ● ● ●							
<i>Case study/business</i> ● ● ● ● ● ●							

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